Incredible invention was earmarked for success

In 2010 What Hi-Fi? Magazine chose as its Product of the Year a portable iPod speaker system called the rCube. It is the brainchild of UCL research fellow Bradford Backus, and was inspired by his love of tapdancing. Tired of lugging an unwieldy boombox around Boston when he was a student at MIT, Brad dreamed of an audio system that would be small enough to fit into a book bag but powerful enough for a (very loud, if need be) student party.

The idea took shape when Brad joined UCL’s Ear Institute in 2006 and attended a workshop of the London Entrepreneurs’ Challenge, where he met his business partner, Steven Gildorf, an MBA student at London Business School. With the help of UCL Advances, the two formed Audio3 and developed a business plan.

Audio3 won the London Entrepreneurs’ Challenge and the Provost’s Prize in 2007, as well as a Bright Ideas Award in 2008. Audio3 invested their prize money in developing a top-quality prototype, which was subsequently produced through a licensing deal with elite British hi-fi maker Arcam. The rCube is now distributed around the world in outlets like Harrods.

Brad has since advised Camden-based loudspeaker designers Ferguson Hill, to whom he was introduced through the HELO programme run by UCL Advances, on their prototypes. He has also reinvested the royalties from the sales of rCube in his second invention, the soundBADGE.

Developed with the Royal College of Music and London South Bank University, the soundBADGE is an easy-to-use noise dosimeter that accurately measures the levels of noise a wearer is being exposed to, and comes from Brad’s interest in noise-induced hearing loss (NIHL) — “ironic”, he laughs, “given my first invention.”

He says: “We are living longer and louder lives, so NIHL is on the increase. The soundBADGE could help prevent some of this loss, improve quality of life for those at risk and save our health services some money, too. We are looking to manufacture the product ourselves here in the UK, largely thanks to the knowledge, experience and, not least, confidence we gained through working with UCL Advances.”

Did You Know?

UCL’s Daniel Jones, who became Britain’s first Professor of Phonetics in 1921, was George Bernard Shaw’s real-life model for Henry Higgins in Pygmalion.
About UCL

UCL (University College London) was established in 1826 and is ranked as one of the world’s top-ten universities. The university is a modern, outward-looking institution, with more than 4,000 academic and research staff committed to engaging with the major issues of our times. It has a global reach, with 34% of its students coming from outside the UK, from almost 140 countries.

www.ucl.ac.uk

About UCL Advances

The centre for entrepreneurship at UCL, UCL Advances, offers training, networking and business support for staff, students and external entrepreneurs to encourage and enable new enterprises to get going. Unique in the UK Higher Education sector, its primary role is to promote a culture of entrepreneurship on campus and engagement with entrepreneurs and small businesses beyond UCL’s boundaries, and currently delivers over 30 activity programmes.

UCL Advances is affiliated with UCL Enterprise, which provides UCL’s structures for engaging with business for commercial and societal benefit.

www.ucl.ac.uk/advances
www.ucl.ac.uk/enterprise

About Student Engagement

UCL is keen to help those students who are entrepreneurial to develop their ideas further. This is supported through the UCL Advances’ Student Venture Program. – a complete programme of support for UCL students that wish to start a business. It includes access to training, mentoring, one-to-one business advice from our in-house advisor, access to loans and grant funding and the use of our Hatchery space.

One of these training programmes is the London Entrepreneurs’ Challenge a workshop programme and business plan competition open to all members of UCL, Royal Veterinary College, Birkbeck and the London Business School that aims to show participants the process of starting a business by helping them do it for themselves. The competition is part of a programme of events designed to enhance UCL’s reputation for entrepreneurship and build deeper relationships between UCL and partner institutions.

www.ucl.ac.uk/studentventures